

Movement and Spatial Requirements of Great Blue Heron Colonies Over Time

Ann Eissinger, Nahkeeta Northwest Wildlife Services*

Great blue heron nesting colonies are well known as an integral part of the Salish Sea ecosystem, however the dynamics within individual colonies are poorly understood. Two major heron colonies, Birch Bay and Point Roberts, both located in northwest Washington, were monitored over an eight to ten-year period. During that period, the colonies were monitored for nesting activity and each colony was mapped annually following the breeding season. The mapping of active nests revealed changes in nesting area and density as well as the migration of each colony over time. These intra-stand movements and changes provide important indicators of spatial requirements for heron colonies. An understanding of heronry dynamics, including spatial requirements for nesting area occupancy, movement and growth over time, is vital for the successful conservation and protection of great blue heron nesting colonies throughout the Salish Sea.